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WHENCE CAME THE FIRST JEWISH SETTLERS OF NEW YORK?

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WHENCE CAME THE FIRST JEWISH SETTLERS OF NEW YORK?

By Leon Hühner, A. M., LL. B., *New York.*

It has frequently been stated that the Jews who settled at New York were the first Jewish settlers within what is now the United States.[1] For this reason the query, "Whence came these early Colonists?" must be of interest to all students of American Jewish history.

Judge Daly, in his admirable work and other writers as well, inform us that these early Jews came from Bahia, Brazil, being refugees from that country.[2] The reasons for this view are: First—We know that there were Jews in Brazil in considerable numbers long before 1650.[3] Second—The Brazilian Jews were tolerated by the Dutch who gained the ascendancy in Brazil in the early part of the 17th century. Third—Because the Dutch power was broken in 1654 and the Portuguese reconquered the country.[4] The Jews consequently had to leave for other parts. In the same year Jews arrived in New Netherland.[5]

All this would seem to show that the Jews who arrived at New York in 1654 on the ship St. Catarina might have come from Brazil. The reason assigned for their coming from Bahia is, because the earliest record, of the Jews at New York, is found in the account of the suit brought by Jacques de

[1] See Daly, *Settlement of Jews in North America*, p. 8. We know of individual Jewish settlers before this time, *e. g.* Lumbrozo in Maryland and the two Jewish soldiers in New York have been mentioned in the *Publications*. To these might be added Solomon Pietersen referred to below, and in *Rec. of New Amsterdam*, I, p. 240.

[2] *Ib.*, p. 6. [3] *Ib.*, p. 5. [4] *Ib.*, p. 6.

[5] *Ib.*, also *Records of New Amsterdam*, vol. 1, p. 242, etc.

la Motthe, the captain of the vessel that brought them, in which it is stated that he demanded payment from the Jews whom he brought from Cape St. Anthony.[1] Now as there is a Cape St. Anthony, a promontory opposite Bahia harbor, it has been considered conclusive that the Brazilian Jews, who were compelled to leave on account of the Dutch capitulation and the advancing Portuguese, hurriedly gathered at Cape St. Anthony, Bahia, and there made that hard contract with the captain to take them to New Netherland.[2]

The only other reason for this conclusion is found in the colonial records of New Netherland, when Gov. Stuyvesant asked the directors in Holland for permission to expel the Jews. The answer states two reasons why such a course should not be taken, namely, that it would be unreasonable and unfair especially because of the considerable loss sustained by the Jews in the taking of Brazil, and also because of the large amount of capital which they have invested in the shares of the West India Company.[3]

While preparing a paper on Asser Levy the writer searched the Court Minutes of New Amsterdam. In these, under date, September 12, 1654, appears the suit by Asser Levy against Rycke Nounes. Both Levy and Rycke Nounes, it is certain, came on the ship St. Catarina and formed part of Captain de la Motthe's company.[4]

In this suit Asser Levy demanded money, which he lent to the defendant at Gamoniké, which the translator of the record informs us is Jamaica.[5] The defendant in turn states that

[1] Daly, *Settlement*, etc., p. 6. See *Records of New Amsterdam*, vol. 1, p. 240, etc.

[2] The contract referred to provided that each passenger was to be liable for the cost of transportation of all the rest.

[3] See Daly, *Settlement*, etc., p. 9. *Documents relating to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, edited by Brodhead, vol. 14, p. 315.

[4] See paper by the writer entitled, "Asser Levy, a noted Jewish Burgher of New Amsterdam," *Publications Amer. Jewish Hist. Soc.*, No. 8, and authorities cited. See also *Records of New Amsterdam*, vol. 1, pp. 242, 249, 254, 259.

[5] *Ib.*, p. 242.

she paid Levy's passage from Gamoniké to New Netherland. It seems, therefore, that in any event the ship which brought the first Jews came from, or at least stopped at, Jamaica.

The question, then, presents itself, "Why could not these Jews have come as readily from Jamaica, or some other portion of the West Indies, as from Brazil?"

For the purpose of investigating this question, several old works have been examined, and original contemporary maps sought out.

This much is certain, that the Jews paid passage from Cape St. Anthony. Is this the Cape St. Anthony off Bahia, Brazil? It is submitted that it is not, but that the place referred to in the record is Cape St. Anthony off the western coast of Cuba.

In searching through the Dutch records, the name Cape St. Anthony frequently occurs in other connections, and it is certain that the place mentioned is not in Brazil. Thus shortly after the arrival of the Jews in New York, there appears in the record a considerable correspondence between the Spanish government and the Dutch authorities, concerning a Spanish ship and cargo taken by a Dutch privateer off Cape St. Anthony. One Juan Gaillardo Ferrara was the complainant at whose instance the Spanish government interfered.[1]

From this correspondence it conclusively appears that Cape St. Anthony must be somewhere near Jamaica and Mexico, for Gaillardo in his affidavit says, that he was on his way from Jamaica to St. Jago de Kuba, when he was attacked in 1654. His chief witness, as appears in Brodhead's *Colonial Documents*, was one Adrian Jans, and his affidavit gives us an idea of what the Dutch understood by Cape St. Anthony. He states that in the year 1654, sailing in the Spanish advice-boat, bound from Carthagena to Campeachy, and from Campeachy on a full cruise in New Spain,

[1] See *Documents relating to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, edited by Brodhead, vol. 2, p. 28. See also pp. 23, 38, etc.

the said boat in the neighborhood of Cape St. Anthony was boarded and plundered by a Dutch privateer who brought the prize to New Amsterdam.[1] He also states that the same privateer had taken a vessel off the coast of Jamaica.[2] The records amply show that by Carthagena is meant the City of Venezuela, for there was a direct line of communication between Carthagena and Jamaica.[3]

Now there is a Cape St. Anthony off the southwestern coast of Cuba, and this undoubtedly is the point meant by the record, for it completely tallies with the above description.

The old maps and books that have been consulted show that Cape St. Anthony, which by the way is now known as Cape Santo Antonio, was one of the most important ports between North and South America.

A glance at the map will show that from its situation it completely commanded the Gulf of Mexico, the Indies and the passage to New Netherland. Spanish ships bound for Mexico, or New Spain, as it was called, the land of gold, had to pass this cape, and near it some of the boldest pirates lay in wait for richly laden vessels.

On several old maps the Cape St. Anthony at Bahia does not appear at all, while Cape St. Anthony in Cuba invariably appears as an important place. This is the case on the map of America, in an atlas published in 1673, known as *Die Unbekannte Neue Welt.*[4] On other maps Mexico and Central America are known as New Spain, the West Indies by that name, and Brazil simply as Brazil.[5]

[1] *Ib.*, p. 28.

[2] One affidavit mentioning the capture of a certain ship off Cape St. Anthony, recited that the ship was on a voyage from Jamaica to "St. Jago de Kuba." *Ib.*, p. 38.

[3] That the ship was actually captured near Jamaica appears from Brodhead's *Colonial Documents*, vol. 1, p. 577.

[4] *Die Unbekannte Neue Welt*, by Dr. O. D., Amsterdam, 1673.

[5] This map applies to Mexico and Central America the name of "Hispania Nova."

Gram's *Atlas of the World*, published in 1897, places St. Anthony exactly where Cape St. Anthony appears on the ancient maps.[1] This port appears strongly marked on Vopell's *Erdglobus*, and on the Paris *Gilt Globe* as early as 1524.[2]

The *Transactions of the West India Company*, written by De Laet and published by Elzevir, at Leyden, Holland, in 1644, mention Cape St. Anthony frequently, and each time the Cuban Cape is meant. Thus in one place it is spoken of as opposite Campeachy; then as on the southern side of Cuba, and again as in the neighborhood of Florida.[3] The Spanish works do likewise; thus Herrera's book, in 1730, speaking of American commerce, says: "From Carthagena we come to Cape St. Anton, on the west side of Cuba about 200 leagues, and from Cape St. Anton to Havana about 50 leagues."[4]

It thus appears that the Dutch records and the West India Company's records, when referring to Cape St. Anthony, mean this important Cuban port and not the promontory off Bahia.

Let us now see what the Dutch records have to say in this connection in regard to the voyage of the Jews. Nowhere do these state that the Jews came from Brazil; quite the contrary, they invariably refer to the Jews as coming from the West Indies.[5] We have already alluded to the

[1] Cape St. Antonio appears opposite Cape Catoche, at the extreme west end of Cuba.

[2] Caspar Vopell's *Erdglobus*, of 1542. On this, the only Cape St. Anthony that is shown is in Cuba. See also *Hamburgsche Festschrift zur Errinnerung an der Entdeckung Amerikas*. The Paris *Gilt Globe* gives both capes.

[3] *Historie ofte Jaerlyck Verhael van de Verricht ighen der Gerctroveerde West Indische Compagnie*, Joannes de Laet, Leyden, by Elzevir, 1644. See p. 87, etc.

[4] *Descripcion de las Indias Ocidentales de Antono de Herrera* (1730), p. 4. Cape St. Anton is described as being opposite Honduras.

[5] See *Records of New Amsterdam* (Court Minutes), vol. 1, p. 249: "Oct. 5, 1654: John Martyas, plf., *vs.* Assar Leeven, deft." Plaintiff

stop made by the party at Jamaica as evidenced on two occasions by the court records. Looking at the map nothing is more natural than that these Jews set out from Jamaica, went to Cape St. Anthony, which they had to pass, and thence to New Netherland. They may have been robbed by privateers before reaching the Cape, and this would account for their impoverished condition. The fact, too, that they came by a French vessel confirms the view that they came from the Indies where the French had considerable possessions.[1]

In another suit by the sailors on the same contract in October, 1654, they are described as the sailors who brought the Jews here from the West Indies.[2]

The entry in the suit against Asser Levy, October 19, 1654, says that Rycke Nounes demanded payment for freight from the West Indies.[3] And on March 15, 1655, we find the order of Van Tienhoven, the sheriff of New York, which reads "that the council have resolved to expel the Jews who came last year from the West Indies."[4] Investigation shows too that the term West Indies, at this period, had a perfectly definite meaning and in no way included Brazil.[5]

sues "as attorney and agent of the sailors who brought the Jews here from the West Indies." Also p. 254, under date Oct. 19, 1654. "Solomon Pietersen, as attorney for Rycke Nounes *vs.* Asser Leeven." Plaintiff in his capacity aforesaid demands payment of fl. 105.18 which Rycke Nounes paid for transportation for him from the West Indies.

Again, *Records of New Amsterdam*, vol. 1, p. 291, referring to the attempt made to expel the Jews in 1655: "Fiscal Cornelis van Tienhoven informed the Burgomasters and Schepens the Director General and Supreme Council have resolved that the Jews who came last year from the West Indies and now from fatherland must prepare to depart forthwith." See also Valentine's *Manual* for 1849, p. 387.

[1] See *History of West Indies* by Capt. Thos. Southey, vol. I, p. 334-35; *Hist. of Brazil*, by Robert Southey, vol. II, p. 710.

[2] *Records of New Amsterdam*, vol. I, p. 249, etc.

[3] *Ibid.* vol. I, p. 259.

[4] *Ibid.* vol. I, p. 291, also Valentine's *Manual*, 1849, p. 387.

[5] See maps and Spanish and Dutch works referred to.

Now the writer does not by any means want to be understood as saying that these early settlers had lived in Jamaica for a long time. All that is claimed is that the Cape St. Anthony from which the Jews came is the port in Cuba, and that there is a possibility that these Jews or some of them were old settlers in the West Indies.

It may be asked, "If these men were old settlers, why did they leave the Indies?" The reason is simple. It is well known that by 1654 the seas around Jamaica and Barbados had become infested with French, Spanish and Dutch privateers and pirates. The records and histories of the time show that all legitimate trade was absolutely ruined. These privateers often descended on neighboring ports, plundering the inhabitants. If these Jews were actually domiciled in Jamaica, they had every reason to leave, both for the reason given and also because Cromwell's fleet which lay in the neighborhood of Jamaica and San Domingo, practically cut off commerce. The histories of Jamaica tell us that when the English took that island in 1655, it was almost depopulated and its plantations ruined.[1] Stuyvesant himself had to go to the West Indies during the year that the Jews arrived, to protest against interference with Dutch trade and the constant capture of Dutch vessels.[2] The Jews, naturally a nation of traders, had every reason, then, to leave Jamaica or some other portion of the Indies, for some place better suited for commerce.[3]

[1] It is also known that Cromwell received valuable information from Jewish residents at Jamaica.

[2] See O'Callaghan's *History of New Netherland*, vol. II, p. 286. Stuyvesant left in December, 1654, and returned in July, 1655.

[3] See *Documents relating to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, edited by Brodhead, vol. 2, p. 23. See also complaints made by the States General for losses on account of captures made at Curaçao, etc. Also *Records of New Amsterdam*, vol. I, p. 576, and Harris' *Discoveries and Settlements of the English*, in Pinkerton's Collection, vol. 12, p. 310, etc.

These arguments are advanced merely because of the possibility and not the probability of the Jews having come from there. The writer is aware that the objections will be made, that we do not know that Jews had settled in the Indies in considerable numbers at this period. If, therefore, this paper will serve to encourage research in this regard, its object will be fulfilled.[1]

That the field is a fruitful one, appears from a curious note which the writer has discovered and which he ventures to give in full. While the agitation concerning the admission of Jews into England was still going on, one Thomas Violet, who had been a customs official under Charles I, published a pamphlet against admitting them. It is entitled "Petition against the Jews presented to the King's Majesty and the Parliament," and was published in London in 1660. After reviewing Cromwell's policy, and the petition of Menassah ben Israel, he proceeds to give his reasons for keeping out the Jews. Among them the following, "that it would be to the great damage of our merchants whose trade they engross and eat the children's bread and in the Barbadoes they do so swarm, that had not care been taken to banish them in twenty years they would eat out the English, but by the care of this blessed Parliament they were within a year to be banished thence."[2] This is perhaps the earliest reference to Jews in considerable numbers in the West Indies.

[1] Since this paper was written, Mr. Max J. Kohler has called my attention to a book entitled *Eight Chapters in the History of Jamaica, from A. D.* 1508-*A. D.* 1680, *Illustrating the Settlement of Jews in the Island*, by Richard Hill, published at Kingston, Jamaica, W. DeCordova, McDougall and Co., no date. From this work it appears that Jews settled in Jamaica as early as the 16th Century and that Jewish settlers were both numerous and influential as early as 1641. After the English conquest they were protected by Cromwell.

[2] The writer found this volume at the Astor Library, New York City.

But to return to Brazil. Besides the proof that the Dutch records do not refer to Cape St. Anthony in Bahia but to the Cape in Cuba, there is still another argument that these New York Jews did not come from Bahia: there were then no professing Jews in Bahia.

There were, it is true, many Jews in Brazil, but it is equally true that none of them resided at Bahia. The Dutch had captured that city in 1623, but they lost it again in 1625, and from that date onward, Bahia remained uninterruptedly in the possession of the bigoted Portuguese, in spite of many efforts to retake it.[1] The Dutch subsequently took Recife or Pernambuco which became their great stronghold, and in which thousands of Jews resided. The Dutch conquests extended north of Recife, but they never managed to get south of it.[2]

In an old work on Brazil by Nieuhoff, the author states that Bahia and Rio were from 1625 on constantly under Portuguese rule, and it was from Bahia as a central point that the Portuguese under Vieyra and others again conquered the country.[3]

Heeren, in his *Historical Researches* says, "All Pernambuco and some contiguous provinces were brought under the dominion of the Dutch who were unable, however, to make themselves masters of Bahia." [4]

Throughout the whole struggle, Bahia was the strong hold of the Portuguese, the Jesuits and the Inquisition, and its record is one of the most intense bigotry.[5] Moreover,

[1] See Heeren's *Historical Researches*, p. 113. Also Nieuhoff's *History of Brazil* in vol. 14 of Pinkerton's *Collection*, p. 733.

[2] See *Spanish and Portuguese South America*, by R. G. Watson, vol. 2.

[3] Nieuhoff's *History of Brazil*. This work is contained in Pinkerton's *Collection of Travels*, vol. 14, p. 733. See also *Spanish and Portuguese South America*, by R. G. Watson, vol. 2, p. 74, and Southey's *History of Brazil*, vol. 2, p. 227, etc.

[4] Heeren, *Historical Researches*, p. 113. St. Salvador was another name for Bahia.

[5] See *Spanish and Portuguese South America*, by R. G. Watson, vol. 2, p. 71. The Holy Office had its agents ~~was established~~ at Bahia. When a liberal

during the entire war, there were the most stringent enactments on both sides to prevent all trade between that city and Recife. The Jews at Recife, therefore, would naturally go to the northward and not south towards their enemies.

From Bahia, the Portuguese fleet proceeded to attack Recife, and that great Dutch city surrendered on January 15, 1654.[1] In September of the same year, Jews came to New York.

The presence of Jews at Recife is shown by Beauchamp in his history of Brazil. The French historian after describing the despair of the Dutch at the capture of Recife proceeds: "Recife was now given over to disorder and anarchy. More than five thousand Jews, who knew no other interest but that of commerce, in their alarm and fear of pillage, in which they saw their wealth menaced, ran through the streets filling the air with their cries and lamentations."[2] Five thousand Jews were therefore in Recife at the time of its capitulation.

It would be absurd to imagine that these Jews after the capitulation would run into Bahia, the enemies' stronghold. The probabilities are that they hastily repaired to the North and settled at various places in the West Indies.

Du Tertre informs us that some nine hundred Jews and Dutch settled at Guadeloupe and a few Jews at Martinique,

plan for founding a Brazilian Company was proposed, it was at once opposed and defeated by the Inquisition. See also Southey's *History of Brazil*, vol. ii, p. 241.

[1] *Ib.*, vol. ii, pp. 239, 242.

[2] *Histoire du Bresil*, by Alphonse de Beauchamp, Paris, 1815, vol. 3, p. 317. Describing the taking of Recife on January 15, 1654, the French historian proceeds: "Le Recif attaqué cette fois dans toutes les regles de l'art militaire etait déja livrè au desordre et à l'anarchie. Plus de cinq mille Juifs, qui n'y connaissaient d'autre interet que celui de leur commerce, alarmés, et cedant à la crainte du pillage dont ils voyaient leur richesses menacées, parcouraient les rues en remplissant l'air de leur cris et de leur gemissemens."

and Southey tells us that at both places the Jews were plundered on their arrival.[1]

It is more than likely therefore that many of these Brazilian Jews seeking refuge in the West Indian Islands in January and February, 1654, came to Jamaica and thence embarked by way of Cape St. Anthony in Cuba, for New Netherland.

To sum up, this paper merely claims the following:

1. That the Jews who settled in New York did not come from Bahia, Brazil.

2. That they came by way of Cape St. Anthony in Cuba.

3. That there is a possibility that they may have been early settlers in the West Indies who left on account of the danger to trade at that period. And,

4. That the most probable view is that they came from Recife in Brazil when that city fell into the hands of the Portuguese on January 15, 1654, that they either lost their goods at Recife, or were plundered on the way, and that between January and August, they had found refuge in Jamaica (Gamoniké) or some other West Indian Island, whence they embarked to the Dutch Colony, of New Netherland.

[1] See Southey's *History of Brazil*, 1817, vol. 2. Also *Ib.*, p. 710. Also Du Tertre, vol. I, p. 528, also pp. 460-5. Du Tertre states that the Governor of Martinique was willing to receive the refugees from Recife, but the Jesuits interposed and represented "that nothing could be more contrary to the King's intentions than that Heresy and Judaism should be received into his colonies." "Their remonstrances were so strong that the governor reluctantly retracted his promise, and treated them as civilly as he could." A few Jews were allowed to settle, and for this the Governor was held up to ridicule. See *Relation du Voyage de Cayenne*, par M. Biet. Southey quotes Du Tertre's defense of the governor which exhibits even stronger feeling. "C'est une imposture effroiable, et un mensonge enorme de dire qu'on ait jamais donné la liberté aux Juifs de faire la moindre action de leur religion. M. Parquet ne se servoit des Juifs qui estoient venus de Bresil en son Isle que comme des esclaves pour les bien de son peuple, ainsi que l'on s'en sert a Rome en Avignon, et à Metz." Vol. I, p. 528. See also *History of the West Indies*, by Capt. Thomas Southey, vol. I, p. 334.

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